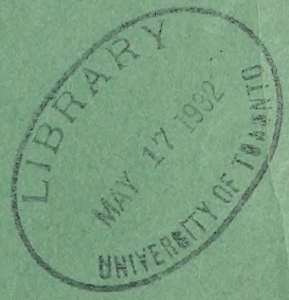


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City Surveys for Town Planning: AND The Greater Cities



BY
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GEDDES AND COLLEAGUES
OUTLOOK TOWER
EDINBURGH
MORE'S GARDEN
CHELSEA
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CITY SURVEYS FOR TOWN PLANNING.¹

BY PROFESSOR P. GEDDES.

University Hall, Edinburgh and Chelsea.

WHAT is the essential object of this meeting, the purpose of this Congress, and the meaning of its annual migrations? Obviously, the survey of Public Health Conditions, city by city; and these for a practical purpose, that of civic betterment. Our enquiries are thus not solely scientific, but of social application; towards the help and advance of existing Health Agencies, towards the co-ordination of all these, with such fresh initiatives as may be necessary. Thought and action are thus closely united, and scientific interest passes directly into civic feeling and activity. These react towards keener and closer survey, this again towards fresh and ever-renewing public services, and so on, in fuller and stronger pulsation of intelligence and effective life. Still, despite this intimate interaction of our problems and our tasks, there is a time for observation, for definite and detailed survey; and this cannot be too thorough, since action needs all the knowledge we can collect, and all the interpretation of it we can attain to. What, then, are the conditions of City Survey?

Given our immediate impressions of the present, our corresponding problem is always to clear up and to define them. Hence the returns and the statistics, the plans and the estimates which municipalities publish, and which also furnish material for the larger and more comprehensive surveys of the city of the present. Such are those which we owe to the Right Hon. Charles Booth, in his monumental "Life and Labour of the People of London," and on a smaller, but still efficient scale, to Councillor Marr for his "Survey of Manchester," to Miss Walker for her "Social Union Report" on Dundee, to Mr. Rowntree for York, and the like. Such surveys are not merely descriptive, or even statistical. As with the older and the later economists they are also geographical; and they set down their main results upon their respective city plans, and thus attain a new clearness. In this way they place under our eyes a detailed, yet generalized, view of the city, as a more or less large and complex hive of humanity, strangely differentiated, strangely crowded, here and there strangely defiled, strangely defective, decayed, diseased. How are we to improve this state of things?

¹ A paper read at the Birkenhead Congress, 1910.

By vigorous demolitions, with most "Improvement" Committees of the past generation? Or by mere expansions, mostly bad or indifferent, as with the building trade for the past hundred years? In the age of Town Planning, of which we are now upon the threshold, we would fain renew the health and beauty of our deteriorated cities, and yet more thoroughly provide for these by new and better expansions, as of Garden Suburbs and the like, upon the comparatively vacant lands without. Here, then, appears the need for enquiring, "How did all this disorder, which at length so shocks us by its mean or hideous aspect, its corresponding effects upon its inhabitants, actually come about?" and we find the explanation, of course, in the vast industrial and commercial expansion which has followed the advent of the age of steam, and in particular its application to the railway. Before the railway age, indeed, our whole town area was but the present nucleus; and it will suffice for our present purpose if we search out old maps of our cities of the onset of the railway age; or, still better, if we open one of these remarkable atlases of the towns of England or of Scotland which were prepared in 1832 to define the Parliamentary limits of the new constituencies. Such a town atlas is curiously instructive in comparison with the plans of the present day, and conveniently those of our own city directories; for in these maps of only between two or three generations ago we find little more than the small towns of the Middle Ages, each with its antique order and beauty more or less fallen into confusion and ruin, yet still more or less distinguishable. Drawn round this little map, and often at considerable distance, there sweeps through the fields the red line of the Parliamentary Boundary (fig. 1). In that day of high hopes and ambitions, just after the Reform Bill and the corresponding arousal and renewal of municipal activity and corporate powers, this line meant much; yet all from the abstract standpoint of the political mind, without a spark of foresight or memory of the then eclipsed art of the town-planner. The qualities, and yet also the defects, of the politician have never been more graphically stated, as here by himself in his own atlas. On the one side, we recognize his comprehensive aims, his breadth of abstract view; on the other, the inadequacy of these through his usual blindness to details, his yet more common absence of any aptitude, much less any scientific training, for generalizing these, and his corresponding failure to see how all these are practically to

be developed, or selected, into the more ideal order for which he so sweepingly legislates. Despite his measure of foresight, his limit of provision for expansion beyond the town boundaries of 1832 was in many cases soon reached, even surpassed, and this sometimes again and again. Nowadays, indeed, around our greater cities, populations are outrunning parliamentary boundaries altogether;

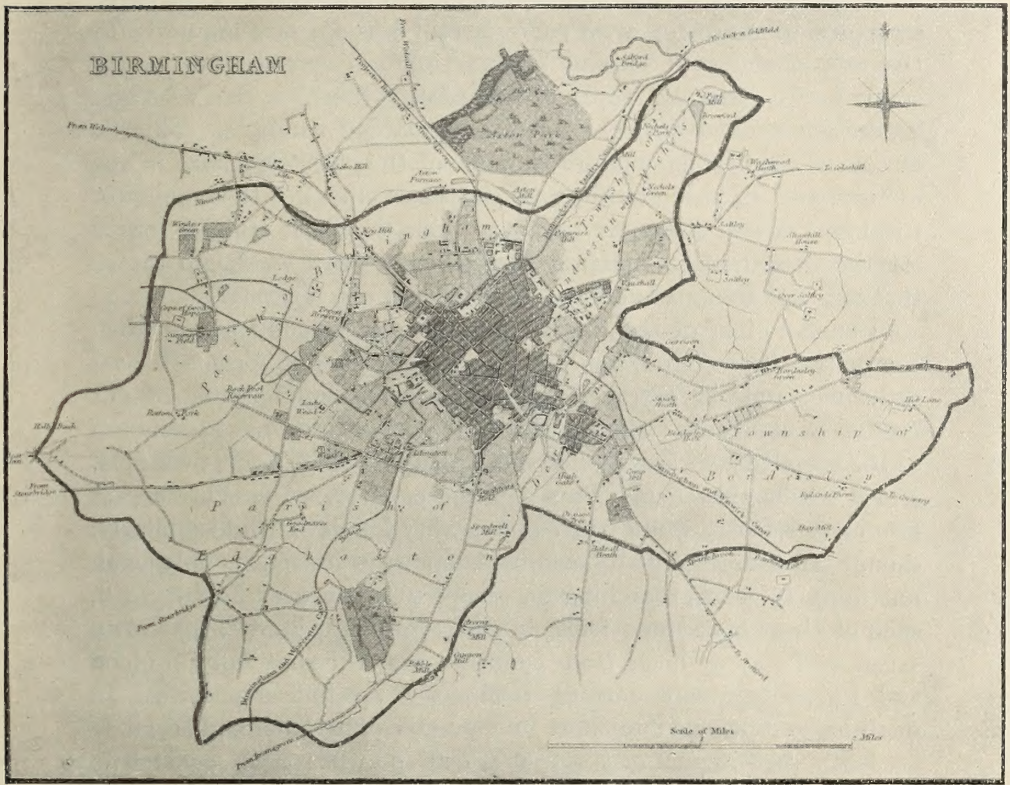


FIG. 1.—Birmingham in 1832, with its Parliamentary boundary (dark line). From Atlas Volume of Lewis's "Gazetteer of England and Wales," 1835.

and thus not only for Greater London, but for more cities than we commonly realize, a revision is necessary, and this not merely of our parliamentary boundaries but of the whole order of thinking to which they belong. It is time to pass from abstract and political treatments of these questions to their concrete geographical

revisal ; and this for every reason ; and primarily, as we know in this Congress, as regards the health of the people, and correspondingly their efficiency in all respects. Geographical factors, everyone here knows, deeply underlie this health and that efficiency ; in fact, they largely determine them. This geographical proposition is, of course, realized here and there beyond the medical and scientific classes, but is as yet little grasped by our political rulers or our municipal fathers. Both are still too much absorbed in their party struggles to unite for civic surveys, still less for any inquiry into the relations of country and town. Borough council and county council are sharply separate administrations, each with its accurately defined duties, its jealously guarded frontiers. This is, of course, explicable enough ; it is one of the oldest divisions in our history, and in that of other countries as well. Yet the conflict of rural and urban interests has ever been the most fruitful source for the deterioration of both ; while conversely we begin to see that it is not enough to aim at their betterment separately.

I have no fear of seeming to introduce party politics here when I cite the Right Hon. John Burns as one of our foremost civic statesmen and Sir Horace Plunkett as correspondingly one of our foremost rustic ones ; since men of all parties unite in appreciation of the excellent work each has done, and is doing, in his own field. Yet if we should see Mr. Burns in the country, we should suspect him at most of a well-earned and scanty holiday : while similarly, though Sir Horace may be seen occasionally in town, it is only as an unwilling prisoner, searching for escape to his beloved fields. Still, each of these statesmen feels, and in a measure knows, that town arises and renews itself from country ; and this not only in blood and in temperament but in tendencies, aptitudes, activities, in qualities and defects ; in short in character, individual and social.

Each statesman must see, as we all do, that town constantly reacts upon country, and this both for good and ill : yet neither has as yet given us any clear guidance, or let in definite light upon this relation of country and town, despite its admitted and increasing urgency. This, in fact, is one of the largest, most difficult, most complex, of the many social questions which beset us. Here then is a problem which these men of action must throw back upon us as students and investigators ; and happily social science, especially in its simplest and fundamental school, that of social geography, is rising to the task. The great geographical societies still mainly

interest themselves in the dramatic exploits and remote discoveries of the polar or tropical explorer (and so far, of course, well); but as yet too little in the more intimate geography, that of regions nearer home, and around it, though these are surely yet more important to life and civilization. Still Regional Geography has come forward—in France especially, in Germany also, in Italy, in America, and even here at home—witness the innumerable and often excellent guide-books produced on all hands, from the great and long established publishers, to the handy “Homeland” and other series of the railway bookstall. The French regional geographers have re-explored and practically rediscovered their country. They show, what France has long felt, how the modern Departments, arranged at the Revolution, are unsatisfactory for almost all purposes other than those of mere Prefectures, centralizing in the interests of Paris. Yet the old Provinces were not so regionally satisfactory, or as romantic or reactionary as they would have us believe; they were in their day confused by feudal, military, ecclesiastical and other interests, much as were departments by political and administrative ones. Constructively, they show how the true regions of France were deteriorated in the past, and how these have again been arising since the Revolution, and particularly since the railway age; and thus a new geographical grouping is gradually being defined. With a community like the French, ever resolute to realize their thought in action, such studies must soon influence the national organization, and regulate that decentralization which is already a recognized political programme, and this rapidly—especially if population, as is not at all impossible, again takes an upward turn.

Thus begins to appear the essential point of the present paper. It is to suggest that our town and county divisions—although in many cases more natural, and in others more practical, than are those of France—are also (in different ways consequent upon our continuous industrial expansion) now for the most part totally inadequate for modern purposes; and that they therefore require a thorough geographical survey, and a corresponding practical revision.

It will, of course, be seen that this is nothing less than a demand for a new “Social and Political Atlas” of our Islands, and one far more thorough-going than that of 1832, or its subsequent developments; while for the preparation of such an atlas we need a new

survey of the whole country as well. The excellent "Statistical Survey of Scotland" in its day largely fulfilled this purpose; and more or less similar works have existed for England. The new "County Histories" are also valuable in this regard, though their too preponderatingly archæological spirit too much limits their treatment of the present. Here then is a task in which much might be done by the co-operation of individual workers with the societies which hold itinerant congress in city after city—as notably this Institute, the British Association &c., for which excellent city guide-books and rural excursion hand-books are so commonly prepared. These, however, have to be collected, completed, and standardized. Here a beginning is being attempted by the Cities Committee of the Sociological Society; but its full development requires the labour of all the local scientific and geographical societies; and notably, I believe, of the "Civics Department," which must surely before long be established in conjunction with each of our more active Universities. A good example of such local co-operation is afforded by the recent "Survey of Woolwich" in which, under the able editorship of Mr. C. H. Grinling a whole group of local societies and specialist workers have collaborated to such good purpose. But as our skippers and pilots think merely upon their chart of soundings and coast-line, indifferent to all within this boundary, so our politicians and our public educators, the Press, still think upon mere Constituency-Maps, blank in almost all respects save as regards mere numbers. Our municipalities, our rustic propertied classes, and our military authorities are in advance of this. They think in terms of the Ordnance Survey Map, with its clearly-defined particulars as regards boundaries and properties, routes and communications; but these are not enough for industrial, much less social, purposes. For these the Geological Map is nowadays indispensable: and this not only as regards national resources, but also as the map which now gives the clue to the modern distribution of the main masses of our population, London alone excepted. Relief and Contour Maps explain the older divisions of population, so small upon the hunting heights and on the pastoral slopes, so dense upon the fertile plain. With this must be taken Messrs. Robert and William Smith's and Dr. Hardy's maps of the Botanical Survey of Scotland—a survey now becoming actively prosecuted for parts of England also, and which yields fresh light alike upon history and upon contemporary conditions.



FIG. 2.—Population map of England and Scottish Midland area (inset showing coalfields). From Bartholomew's "Atlas of England." (By permission of Messrs. J. G. Bartholomew and Son.) Reference to large coloured original map is strongly recommended.

Yet the mapping of human distribution, the Map of British Populations has been little investigated, with one great and distinguished exception—that of Mr. Bosse's map produced in Bartholomew's standard "Atlas of England." To this map (fig. 2) I particularly call attention, as of the utmost importance for public health and town planning, and therefore for a corresponding revision of our ideas (and thence ultimately our administrative and other arrangements) as regards our main urban areas, and the relation of town and country generally. We see clearly from such a map how stupendous has been the Industrial Revolution in its effect upon the development of towns and town aggregates. Constellations we cannot call them: but "conurbations" may perhaps be a necessary word. At any rate the idea is clear that Lancashire for instance is no longer clearly to be thought of as containing the separate and detached towns, whose names we learned at school and still employ. These are now the elements of a far larger City-Region, of which Liverpool is the port, and Manchester the market, of which Oldham and the many other factory districts are the workshop, and so on. Similarly upon each of the other great coalfields and manufacturing areas we find immense groupings of population, which if not, as in the case of Lancashire, already exceeding that of Greater London itself, are growing up towards the already gigantic London of our childhood, with a population already reckoned in millions.

We have tardily and with difficulty extended the conception of "London" from its historic mile to the present vast "province covered with houses." At length in this we include two historic cities, many boroughs, innumerable absorbed villages and hamlets, and new dormitory areas, all growing more and more fully into one vast agglomerate: and now with its own government and corporate unification in progress; but we have largely failed as yet to realize, even locally, much less nationally, how the analogous progress is on foot in each and all of these great industrial regions of Great Britain. Here a study of this map (reproduced by the courtesy of Messrs. Bartholomew), with its curiously branched population groupings in relation to valleys and contours, brings out all the more clearly the need of a revision of our traditional ideas and boundaries of country and town.

These great communities are already exercised, and with reason—yet in most cases not nearly exercised enough—about their

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sanitation and their water supply ; and here our peripatetic Congress and its papers have some arousing influence, though not yet sufficient. Moreover, if better crops of human population, as we are all becoming determined, are to be grown than the present one, the question of a fuller and a far more vital access of youth to the country and to country life and occupations must assume an incomparably greater importance, and correspondingly greater space than that which has yet been given it by municipalities even with the most exemplary Parks Departments.

Even in the town planning movement this enlarged way of looking at our enlarging cities is not nearly common enough. The architect is accustomed to single buildings, or to street plans at most ; the city engineer is accustomed to streets or to street-quarters at most ; and both are reluctant to enlarge their vision. They speak as if any such wide outlook and foresight is "ahead of the times"—"may be useful fifty years hence"—and so on. But here, in this Congress of Public Health, is it not obvious to every member of it as regards the large cities so near us that they are late enough even if they begin already ! Their accesses to Nature and natural conditions have already been largely destroyed ; the neighbouring great towns are rapidly linking up by tramways and streets no less than railways, while great open spaces which might have been not so long ago cheaply secured as unrivalled lungs of life are now becoming almost irrecoverable. I submit then, not without due deference, yet also with due definiteness, that a unified "Survey of Urban Lancashire" considered as at many points an already too much consolidated, yet ever-growing city region, is one of the most urgent tasks of public health and social science ; and this not only for the future of this particular region, but for that of England, of which it is so large and important a factor.

To focus this idea, and express it more sharply, let me plead for a new name for this region as a whole, and similarly for each similar region. Failing a better name, since we cannot sink Liverpool and other cities in a "Greater Manchester" or the like, let us christen the vast conurbation of the Lancashire millions as "Lancaston." This "Survey of Lancaston" we need to realize in detail, and in mass. Imagine it photographed from an aeroplane journey, as well as mapped with the detail of Mr. Booth's London Survey. Between these at present we have at any rate Bartholomew's map already referred to ; and in all these ways we can gradually

accustom ourselves to visualise the region in its existing defects, and with its remaining possibilities—of natural reserves to separate, and of allotments to sanify its growing villages and suburbs. Leaving Lancaster we have but to cross the Pennines to see at the foot of their eastward slope a new galaxy of towns constituting the world-metropolis of wool no less distinctly than does Lancaster that of cotton. What shall we call this province, this natural City-Alliance? Why not in an urban sense as of old a rustic one, simply preserve the good name of West-Riding? Similarly for South-Riding, as we may call the conurbation centering round the steel and coal of Sheffield. Note again the present expansion of Birmingham, which is legitimately seeking to have its overflowing suburbs unified with itself, its extraordinary growth recognized as now a city exceeding even Manchester or Glasgow. Yet this present expansion is but a step in the old process. It is recognition of regional facts for which I am pleading; for the present Birmingham Bill has no adequately natural regional basis, but is only a temporary and makeshift expansion after all, if prosperity and growth continue. That larger recognition of regional facts involves the conception of a large city region of "Midlandton," as we may call it: of this, even Greater Birmingham is but the capital, though its exact limits may be hard to define. The recent union of the "Five Towns" is thus not only a local event, but a regional pioneering, a noteworthy example of an incipient urban re-grouping. Let us hope that the Duke of Sutherland's generous gift of Trentham may similarly augur a period of better relations of town and country throughout the land than have been those of yesterday.

Pass now to South Wales, where on its magnificent coalfield the same phenomenon is at work. We plainly see the development of a Greater Cardiff, a veritable (South) Walesdon, whose exact limits and relation to the metallurgic centre of Swansea are, of course, for its regional geographer to define. Pass next northwards to the Tyne towns, with which we must plainly also take those of Wear and Tees, as constituting a new regional community, a natural province, Tyne-Wear-Tees as we may perhaps call it. Interesting in this connection it is to recall that our British gallery at the Brussels Exhibition has been adorned with a well-drawn perspective of this very region, taken from a bird's eye view (or as we may nowadays say from an aeroplane view) from above the sea-coast, a circumstance which clearly shows that the economic and social

unity of such natural regions as is here pleaded for is already becoming conscious, in these city regions themselves.

In conclusion, let us pass to Scotland. Here again the history and geography of popular notions, that of the schools in which we were brought up is no longer adequate. Glasgow is the main centre of activity and population in Scotland, far outnumbering and outweighing Edinburgh; the real capital in many respects. But this Greater Glasgow itself is something far vaster than the present name and borough limits at all describe; it includes practically the Clyde ports and watering places, with inland boroughs and villages not a few. Edinburgh has its marked regional individuality; and its growth is more than is commonly realized, already approaching half a million, and plainly destined, with due development of its adjacent coalfield, to double this within the century. Though from historic tradition and from present holiday associations most people even in Scotland still think of the Scots as in the main a nation of hardy rustics, no population is now so urban, and, as sanitary reformers know, none so ill-housed at that. More than half the population of Scotland is thus crowded upon this central isthmus; and with the approaching construction of the Clyde and Forth Canal (which is so plainly a matter not only of Scottish but even of national, imperial, and international policy) it is plain that we shall thus have a linking up of these two great cities of Scotland into a new regional capital—a bi-polar city region indeed, yet also more and more and more uniting into one vast conurbation—Clyde-Forth as we may soon call it.

Here, then, over England and Mid-Scotland we see a New Heptarchy, growing up naturally, almost unconsciously, beneath our traditional existing political and administrative network; and destined not merely to go on as at present, stretching this old network, but now rather to evolve some new form of organization better able to cope with its problems than are the present distinct town and county councils. What are the new forms to be? I believe it is not yet safe for us to speculate upon this until the needful Regional Survey is more advanced. One other suggestion is also practical enough; there should be, and that speedily and increasingly, amicable Conference among all the representatives, rustic and urban, of the various cities and county regions concerned. The old Borough Councils and County Councils can no longer separately cope with what are becoming plainly large regional

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tasks, like those of water supply and sanitation. The example of London and its County Council, its separate boroughs, here merits study, alike for its suggestiveness and for its warnings.

It is not yet time to press for political rearrangements which might too readily come to mean premature disputes and frictions, not to speak of legal difficulties and expenses. But it is plainly time for the co-operation of the regional geographer with the hygienist, and of both with the concrete sociologist, the student of town and country, of village and city; and also for the furtherance of their labours and the discussion of them in detail in friendly conference of representatives of all the various groupings and interests concerned.

